

With the little man as
their listening post,
American agents would
hear every growl of the
Nazi war machine.

AMAN CALLED GEORGE WOOD

BY ROBERT G. DEINDORFER

ILLUSTRATION BY FRED OTNES

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fter the two of them had talked for almost an hour, Gerald Mayer asked the stranger to please come to the point. Mayer had arranged the secret meeting at the stranger's request, and he was tired of waiting.

Whatever it was, Mayer didn't expect it to amount to much. As a wartime intelligence officer in the American Legation in Bern, Switzerland, he'd interviewed enough Swiss, Austrian and German sources to develop a fairly sure feel for people. Somehow, Mayer's instincts told him the gaunt stranger was just another harmless crank without anything important to contribute.

Briefly, very briefly, the man hesitated. It was a small thing, but Mayer filed the reaction away in his mind. Then the man reached into the side pocket of his dark, rumpled coat. He opened an envelope, shook out some papers, pushed them across the desk.

Gerald Mayer felt his nerve ends tighten as he read the papers that afternoon in August of 1943. They were all typed in formal German, all stamped *Geheime Reich Sache*. If they were genuine, they were nothing less than secret official reports from the Nazi German Foreign Office.

Where did you get these?"

**The American spymaster
was shocked to learn
there was a German agent
on the household staff.**

Mayer tried to keep his voice casual.

"I am merely acting as an agent for a friend who works in the *Auswaertige Amt* (Foreign Office), he said. "This man is here now in Bern. He arrived yesterday as a special diplomatic courier."

All of a sudden Mayer knew what he had to do. Excusing himself, he ran upstairs and rapped on the door of his superior. He told of his conversation with the stranger and passed the documents over.

Allen Dulles, chief of America's Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland and, later, Director of the CIA, listened carefully. The tweedy, pipe-smoking spymaster asked Mayer a question, asked another, before he picked up the papers. At first glance they looked like the real thing.

Yet, on the basis of his long experience in the field, Dulles was all too aware of the fact that things are seldom what they seem in the world of spies. The most likely looking informants turn out to be setups trained to play an artful double game, feeding false information dished up by enemy headquarters.

"This could be an attempt to break our code," Dulles picked at his words. "The Germans figure we'll bite, cipher this stuff and radio it on to Washington. They monitor everything, including the Swiss commercial wireless channels."

Mayer nodded. He was aware of the hazards, too.

"Or perhaps our friend is an *agent provocateur*," Dulles said. "He plants the information with us and then tips off the Swiss police that we are spying. His rendezvous with us is proof, and we are kicked out of this country."

The OSS chief scratched a wooden match and got his pipe going again. "Still, there is just a glimmer of a chance that this man is on the square."

So the game would go on, at least for another play. Mayer agreed to make arrangements for a secret meeting with the courier.

Promptly at midnight the gaunt man and a short, balding companion clad in a leather coat pulled the bell at the U.S. Legation. Not far away an OSS lookout sat watching from a parked car. An accomplice leaned against a wall on the far side listening for any footsteps along the quiet street.

know whether the two men were being followed by anyone. As things turned out, they weren't.

Moments later the heavy, wrought-iron door clashed shut behind the two visitors.

In view of his lofty secret rank in the American intelligence structure, the resident OSS chief was introduced not as Dulles but as Douglas, identified not as Mayer's superior but as an assistant. Sometimes small deceits made a big difference.

In a comfortable office up on the second floor the four men had a cool drink. After a few minutes of talk the short, balding German got right to the point. He opened a thick brown envelope, a German swastika stamped into the red sealing wax, and produced a heavy bundle of papers.

"If I'm not mistaken, you will find here 186 separate items of information," he said.

Out they came, verbatim copies of official documents, paraphrases of cables and dispatches, abrupt shorthand notes of staff meetings, reports of visits by the Japanese ambassador, sabotage missions in occupied France, and reports on Nazi troop morale along the Russian front. This was the diplomatic inventory of a nation at war, secrets picked from the pockets of the Nazi German Foreign Office.

Despite a number of impressive intelligence victories in both the First and Second World Wars, Allen Dulles was awed. Blinking hard behind his glasses, shuffling through the documents with his big, thick-knuckled hands, he realized that he'd never ever hit on a mass of secret material to compare with it.

"You gentlemen will ask whether these dispatches are authentic and, if so, how I was able to get them." The German leaned forward in his chair. "They came from the material which crossed my own desk at the Foreign Office."

As he explained it, he served as an assistant to the Foreign Office liaison officer with all the Nazi armed services in Berlin. In that capacity he saw a regular flow of battle plans, submarine routings, troop movements, military government reports, special secret war projects and other highly classified

documents revealing Luftwaffe (German Air Force) total strength and specific flight movements.

Bit by bit the visitor filled out the rest of his story. He'd been with the Foreign Office for a fairly long time—more than 15 years, in fact—serving in Germany and abroad and had been given a series of promotions. He was a hard-working bureaucrat helping turn the wheels of government. He found his job interesting and challenging.

Dulles was impressed but still doubtful. During a bend in the conversation he asked the questions he'd been wanting to ask. He asked the Foreign Office employee what he thought of the Nazis.

In a chair on the far side of the room, the mousy little man's face colored some. He was a devoted German, he told them, but also a strong anti-Nazi, although he kept his opinions tightly bottled up except in the company of a few, like-minded friends.

The more he talked, the more his contempt for the Nazis showed through. Almost a year earlier he'd even wondered about offering his own secret services to one of the neutral diplomats—Swedish, Swiss, Portuguese—stationed in Berlin. But with security walls becoming more menacing all the time, he finally decided on another course.

In January of 1943, he began in secret to copy important documents he saw there in the Foreign Office. Month after month he'd made copies of reports, cables, dispatches, communiques, inbound and outbound correspondence. Sooner or later he expected to be assigned a special courier trip to Sweden or Switzerland and would try to make a proper connection.

When he was given a courier run to Switzerland, he uncovered the classified papers hidden in his home and strapped them to his legs under his pants. He caught the train assigned him, crossed three frontiers without security people discovering the materials he was carrying, and contacted the Americans through a friend. Now here he was.

The German bureaucrat didn't finish his story until after three in the morning. All of them were worn and tired. Yet a number of tough questions remained.

What if Nazi security forces discovered he was stealing Foreign Office secrets, for example? He was perfectly willing to take his chances. What did he expect for his contributions? Even the best-motivated of agents might accept some money, if only to cover expenses. Nothing, he wanted nothing at all: no money, no favors, nothing except perhaps some help once World War II was over. When would he return to Switzerland with more intelligence data? Weeks, even months. It was hard to say.

Before he left the U.S. Legation to

Continued from page 29

At terrible risk, the undercover agent stayed on the job until the last days of World War II.

catch a train for Berlin later that morning, a cover name had to be picked for the agent. For no particular reason, Dulles hit on the name Wood, George Wood, which sounded as good as any.

Dulles and Mayer stayed up until daybreak reading through the astonishing harvest of material Wood left with them. They sorted it into classifications: military, air force, navy and diplomatic. They marked passages they wanted to cross-check with other data, pulled out top secrets so perishable they had to be shuttled on to Washington, D. C., immediately. They realized America had only scratched the surface of what was yet to come, provided George Wood followed through on his promise.

After all, even if the bureaucrat actually decided to risk his life by systematically stealing documents, he might well be uncovered, imprisoned and put to death by Nazi security. The British had lost a valuable in-place agent a month earlier; a Russian spy ring operating in Frankfurt had come unglued in April when a relay man talked too much in a cafe.

In case Dulles needed any proof of Nazi efficiency, he had only to recall a shattering incident in Bern. At dinner one evening his cook heard Dulles speaking German with a distinguished-looking guest. She slipped out of the kitchen, examined the guest's hat and took down the initials marked on the inside. Next morning she turned the information over to her Nazi espionage contact. Luckily, word of her activities got back to the American spymaster in time to prevent further lapses.

Despite the risks, George Wood became an American agent. In his lofted second-floor office he wrote brief shorthand memos about classified cables, transcribed the entire texts of official communiques, riffled through papers on adjoining desks in his section. Two, sometimes three times a week he remained long after normal hours to make certain that no important information escaped his notice.

Just when Dulles despaired of ever seeing him again, Wood materialized in Switzerland, in October, out on another courier run to Bern. He turned over data on a major Panzer troop transfer, strategic supplies of tungsten smuggled into Germany from Spain in orange crates and an abrupt change of command in

central Europe, among other high-priority items. With the Allied invasion of Europe a gathering success, Wood also spelled out the Nazi's elaborate new security program for occupied France.

After a quiet dinner in Dulles' house, George Wood said he wanted a pocket Minox camera to photograph documents instead of doing shorthand notes. The two men developed a simple cipher code based on symphony music. Before their meeting came to an end that night they even hit on an elaborate signal system in case Dulles ever needed to contact Wood directly in Berlin.

Once, just once, the owlish American spy chief found that he had to cast an emergency line. He proceeded according to plan. Several days later Wood received a seemingly innocent post card signed with the name of a fictitious Swiss girl friend, on which she wrote that an acquaintance who ran a toy store had completely sold out of Japanese toys.

Wood was able to read between the lines. Next time he arrived in Switzerland he handed Dulles a sheaf of cable copies of the Japanese military situation from German officers based in the Far East.

George Wood got back to Bern a fourth time, and a fifth, and a sixth. Altogether he supplied Allen Dulles and the United States with more than 2,700 classified German documents. He passed on so many vital top secrets that even today it's difficult to say exactly which one was the most valuable—although the English remain especially thankful that Dulles tipped them off to the fact that a butler, code-named Cicero, or Five Fingers, who served the British Ambassador to Turkey, was actually a Nazi spy.

More remarkable still, Wood continued producing secret material right up through the last convulsions of the Nazi Third Reich in 1945. He remains a fascinating figure in an age dark with intrigue: a gifted major amateur among hardrock professionals, a hero to some, a traitor to others.

Perhaps Allen Dulles put Wood's remarkable contributions in the most realistic perspective. As Dulles told a friend years later, mousy little George Wood loved his own country so much that he risked his life in an effort to save

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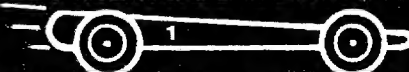


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